

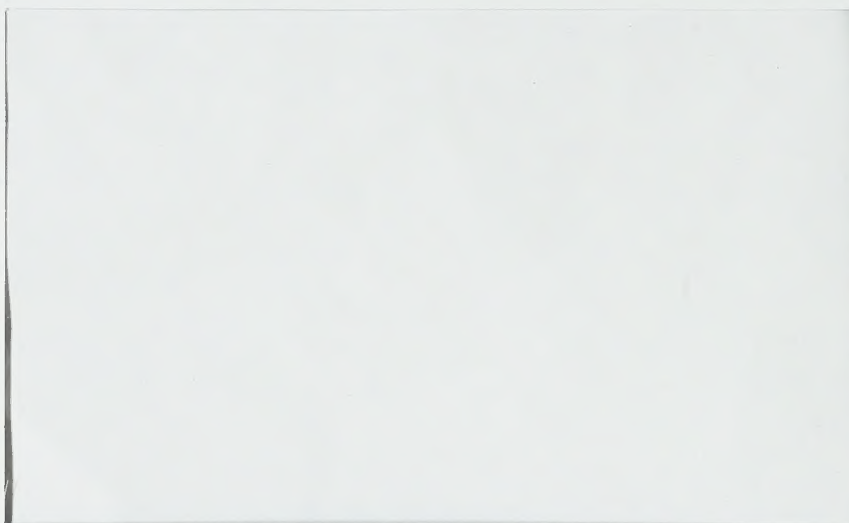
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A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT OF  
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN ONTARIO

*Current Issue Paper 167*



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**A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT OF  
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November 1995



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## INTRODUCTION

While Aboriginal peoples make up only 2.4 percent of Ontario's total population, they are one of the most unique groups of people in Ontario. No other group in the province, for example, has as complicated a social-legal status as individuals of Indian, Metis or Inuit ancestry. Ontario Indians may or may not be registered under the *Indian Act*, have membership in one of 126 distinct Indian bands, be eligible for benefits under one of five treaties or live on one of 185 reserves. In addition, no other group in the province has such low levels of education and income and such chronically high levels of unemployment.

This Current Issue Paper provides a statistical snapshot of selected characteristics of Ontario's Aboriginal population. It is based on information gathered from the 1991 Census and the follow-up Aboriginal Peoples Survey.<sup>1</sup> The 1991 Census question on ethnic or cultural origins provided a wealth of data on those persons who reported having North American Indian, Metis or Inuit origins (slightly over one million persons in Canada; just under a quarter of a million persons in Ontario). The information pertained to age and demographic composition, languages spoken and understood, education levels, labour force composition and income characteristics. Following the Census, a large-scale survey of a sample of persons who reported having Aboriginal origins (just over three hundred and fifty thousand in Canada; just over seventy thousand in Ontario) was conducted. Information gathered from the follow-up Aboriginal Peoples Survey pertained to work history, occupations, housing characteristics and social conditions.

The following data is organized into six sections: 1) Demographics; 2) Language; 3) Education; 4) Aboriginal Peoples in the Labour Force; 5) Housing; and 6) Social Conditions.

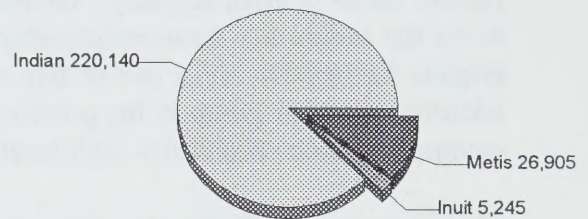
This Paper is intended to be a statistical overview of some of the more relevant socio-economic characteristics of Aboriginal peoples in Ontario. It does not analyze the basis and implications of these characteristics or other important issues related to Aboriginal peoples, such as land claims and self-government.<sup>2</sup>



## Demographics

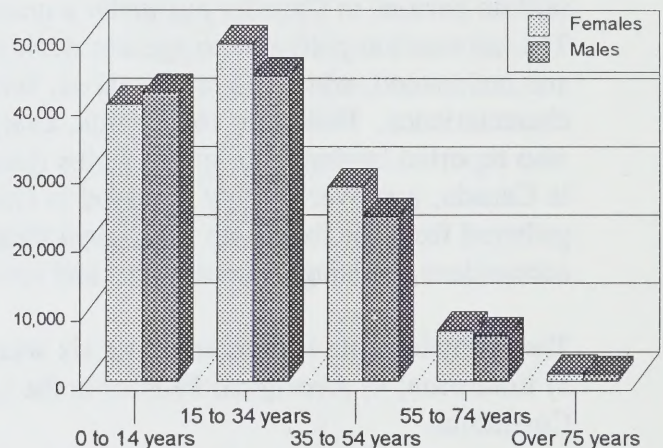
Aboriginal peoples make up 2.4% (243,555) of Ontario's overall population (10,084,885). The overwhelming majority of these are Indian. Twelve percent (29,240) of all Indians live on a reserve.

Ontario's Aboriginal Population



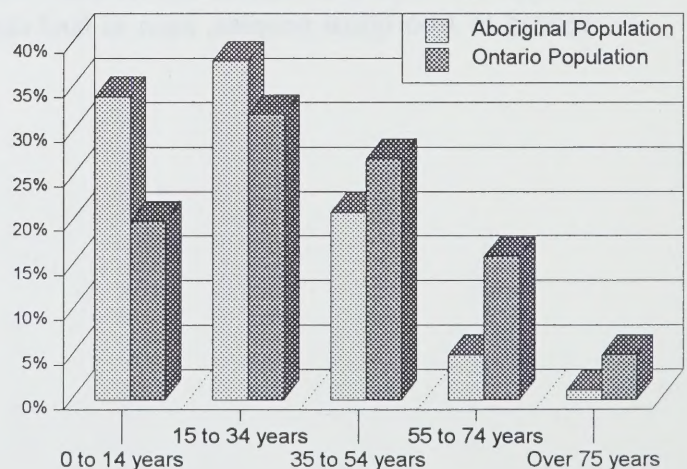
In terms of age, almost three quarters of Ontario's Aboriginal population is under 34 and almost one third are under 15:

Age of Aboriginal Population



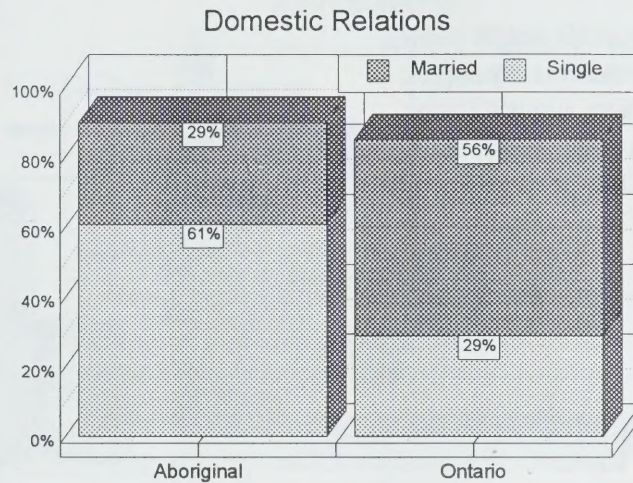
The relative youth of Ontario's Aboriginal population is significant, considering that only half of the overall provincial population is under 34:

Aboriginal vs. Ontario Population





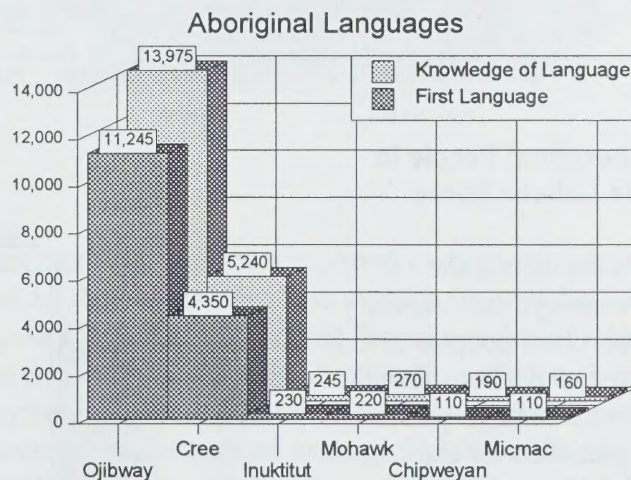
As of 1991, 29% of Ontario's overall population was single and 56% were married. This contrasts sharply with Ontario's Aboriginal population, 62% of whom were single and 29% were married:



## Language

An overwhelming majority of Ontario's Aboriginal peoples speak either English or French as their first language (84% English, 7% French). Eleven percent, however, report a traditional Aboriginal language as their first spoken.

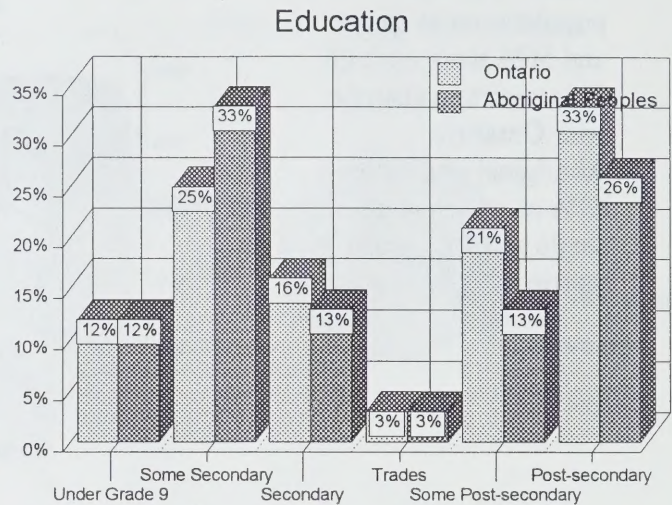
The following graph illustrates the Aboriginal languages first spoken, as well as the Aboriginal languages which are understood by, Ontario's Aboriginal peoples:



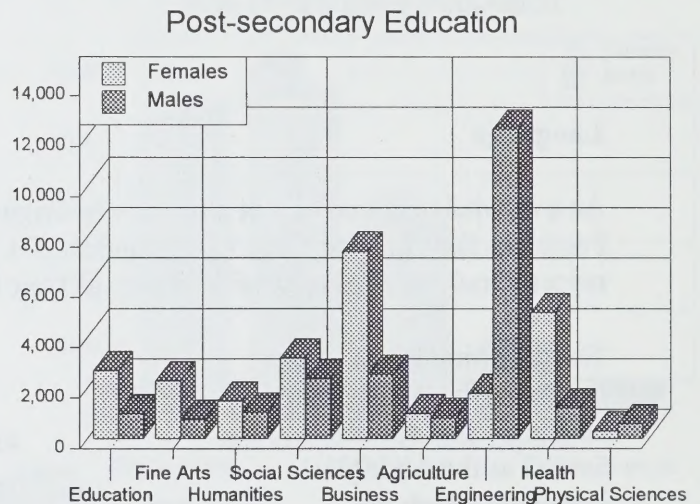


## Education

As this graph shows, Aboriginal peoples have slightly lower levels of education than Ontarians as a whole:

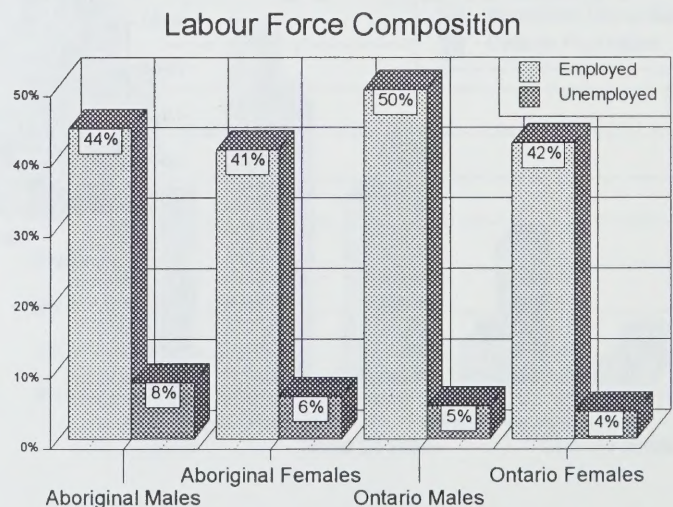


The major areas of study for those Aboriginal individuals with post-secondary education are as follows:

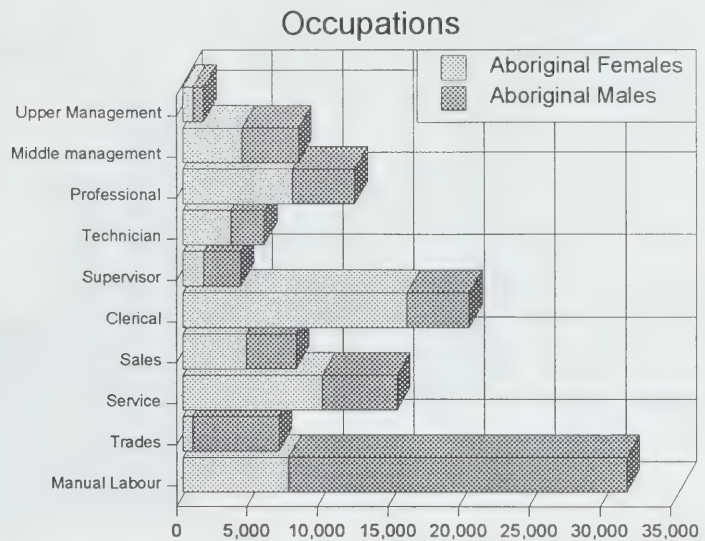


## Aboriginal People in the Labour Force

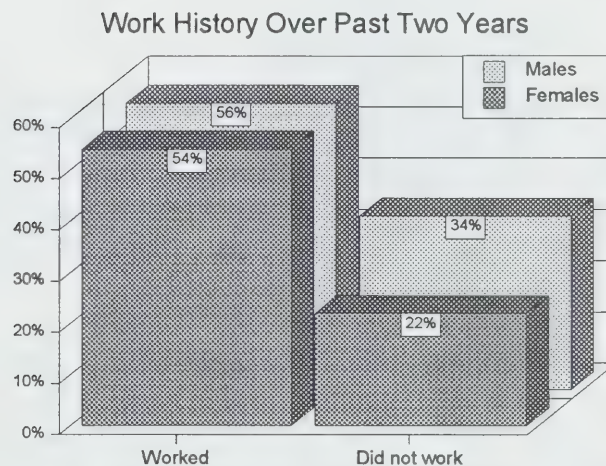
On the whole, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal peoples in the provincial labour force is five percentage points higher than for the overall population:



For employed Aboriginal Ontarians, the largest occupational category is manual labourer, followed by clerical staff:



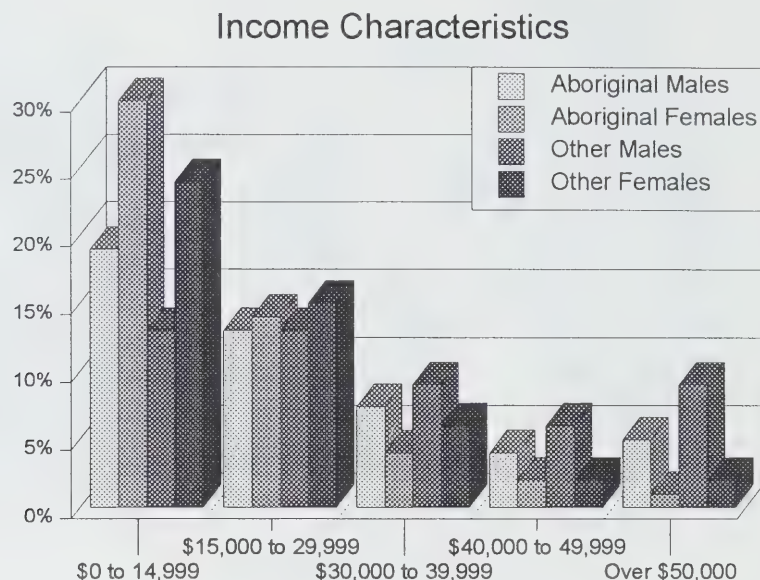
The following graph illustrates the work history of Aboriginal peoples in Ontario over the past two years:



On an individual basis, Ontario's Aboriginal peoples reported earning significantly less income in 1991 than the rest of the population: The average income for Aboriginal males was \$24,134, while the average income for all provincial males was \$33,036. While women on the whole made only about half of what men made, it is interesting to note the parity between Aboriginal women, who made on average \$15,395, and other provincial women, who made on average \$15,090. The low income cut-off level for individuals living in cities in the early 1990s was \$15,452 and in rural areas was \$10,520.<sup>3</sup> Comparable figures for a family of four were \$30,655 and \$20,869 respectively.<sup>4</sup>



Aboriginal people earned less than the overall provincial population:

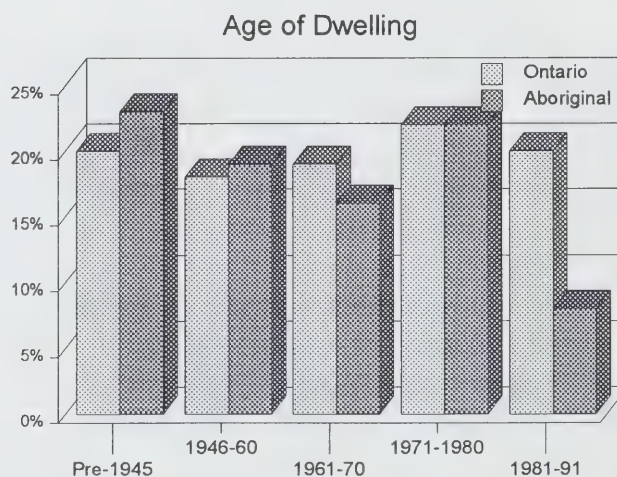


## Housing

Aboriginal dwellings (i.e., both rented and owned residences) constitute only 6.5% of all dwellings in Ontario. Given the distribution of Aboriginal income, it is not surprising that the average number of rooms per Aboriginal dwelling (3.5) is significantly lower than the provincial average (6.3). It follows that the average number of Aboriginal people per room (0.6) is also slightly higher than the provincial average (0.4).

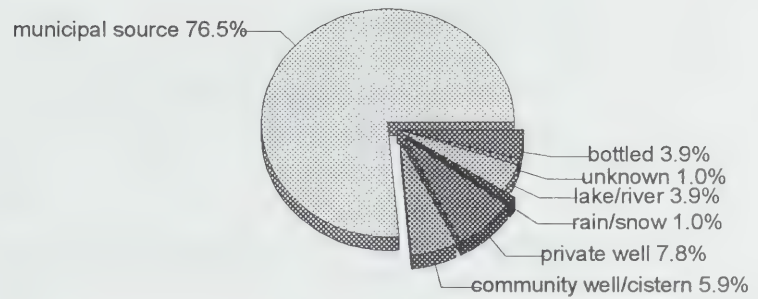
The proportion of rented dwellings lived in by Aboriginal peoples (49% of total) is comparable to the number lived in by the rest of the provincial population (46% of the total). The average price of rent for Aboriginal dwellings, however is significantly lower (\$495) than the provincial average (\$658), as is the average mortgage payment (\$603 for Aboriginal dwellings; provincial average is \$831).

Compared with the provincial population, Aboriginal peoples tend to live in older dwellings:



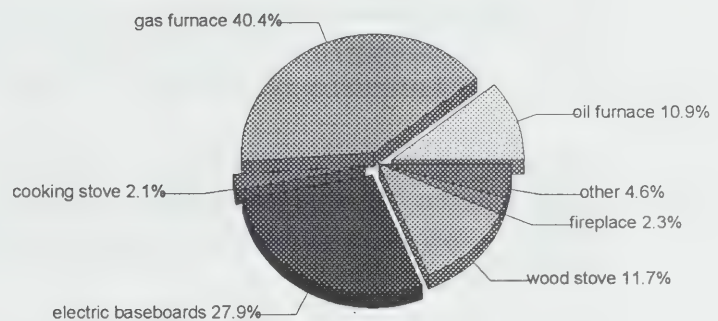
Most Aboriginal dwellings in Ontario derive their water from municipal sources. Some dwellings, though, rely on surface sources such as lakes and rain run-off.<sup>5</sup>

Water Source



The largest proportion of Aboriginal dwellings in Ontario are heated by gas furnaces, even though wood stoves and fireplaces are significant sources of heat for many dwellings:

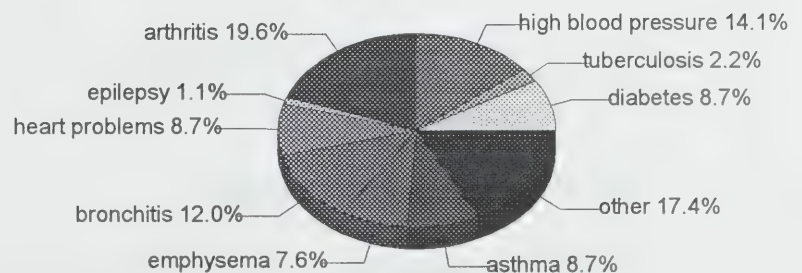
Heating Source



## Social Conditions

As part of the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, Statistics Canada conducted an in-depth study into the health and lifestyle of Aboriginal peoples.<sup>6</sup> Of the 71,025 Aboriginal individuals who responded to the special survey, 37% reported that they had chronic health problems. In addition, 92% of respondents reported suffering from one of the following health problems:

Reported Health Problems



## CONCLUSION

As of 1991, Aboriginal peoples made up 2.4% (243,555) of Ontario's general population (10,084,885). Of these peoples:

- an overwhelming majority (220,140, or 90%) were of Indian origin;
- almost three quarters were under the age of 34 (compared with only half of the general provincial population), and almost one third were under the age of 15 (compared with one fifth of the general population); and
- two thirds were single (compared with almost one third of the general population), while only one third were married (compared with almost two thirds of the general population).

While most Aboriginal peoples in Ontario speak either English (84%) or French (7%) as their first language, a number of Aboriginal languages, including Ojibway, Cree and Inuktitut, continue to be the first language spoken by some Aboriginal peoples.

Compared with the rest of the province, Aboriginal peoples not attained high levels of education. This is particularly evident at post-secondary levels, where 39% of aboriginal peoples have at least some post-secondary experience, compared with 54% of Ontarians.

On the whole, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal peoples is five percentage points higher (14%) than it is for the general provincial population (9%). For employed Aboriginal peoples:

- the most reported occupation (25% of total occupations reported) was manual labourer, followed by clerical staff (17% of total);
- just over half reported having an income below \$20,000 per year, while 40% of employed Ontarians had a similar income.

With respect to Aboriginal housing:

- the average number of rooms per Aboriginal dwelling (3.5) is considerably lower than the provincial average (6.3);
- the proportion of rented Aboriginal dwellings (49% of total) is not much different than the provincial proportion (46% of total), although the average cost of rent for Aboriginal dwellings (\$495) is lower than the provincial average (\$658), as is the average mortgage payment (\$603 for Aboriginal dwellings; provincial average is \$831);



- there is a significantly lower proportion of Aboriginal dwellings built in the past decade (under 10%) than dwellings in the rest of the province (nearly 20%);
- just over three quarters of Aboriginal dwellings derive their drinking water from a municipal source, while only 5% derives from a surface source such as a lake or rain run-off; and
- 40% of Aboriginal dwellings are heated by a gas furnace, while wood stoves or fireplaces heat just over 16% of Aboriginal dwellings.

Of the 71,025 Aboriginal peoples who responded to the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 92% reported suffering from a major health problem, such as arthritis (20%), high blood pressure (14%) or diabetes (9%).

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all statistical data is derived from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, which is published in the following places: Canada, Statistics Canada, *Profile of Canada's Aboriginal Population* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1994); Canada, Statistics Canada, *Language, Tradition, Health, Lifestyle and Social Issues* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1994); Canada, Statistics Canada, *Schooling, Work and Related Activities, Income, Expenses and Mobility* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1994); Canada, Statistics Canada, *1- Disability, 2- Housing* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1994). Data for Ontario is derived from Canada, Statistics Canada, *Profile of Census Divisions and Subdivisions in Ontario* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1995).
2. See, for example, James Frideres, *Native Peoples in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Inc., 1993), especially chapter four.
3. Low income cut-off level is defined as the level of gross income below which people spend disproportionate amounts of money on food, shelter and clothing. See the National Council of Welfare, *Poverty Profile 1993* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1995), pp. 2-3.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. Unfortunately, there are no comparable statistics regarding water and heating sources for the rest of the province.
6. The Survey did not report on other aspects of Aboriginal peoples' health and lifestyle, such as infant mortality rates, suicide rates or incidence of domestic violence. Figures which are available from other sources are either dated or not broken down by province. See, for example, Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Highlights of Aboriginal Conditions, 1981-2001* (Ottawa: INAC, 1989); Canada, Medical Services Branch, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Health Data Book* (Ottawa: Department of National Health and INAC, 1985); and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Choosing Life: A Special Report on Suicide Among Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995).





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